

'QUMRANGATE'- WHERE MIRACLES SOMETIMES HAPPEN

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Aren Maeir's decision to come forth on the ANE-2 list and identify himself as the Department Chairman whom I spoke to regarding the alleged planting of objects for the media at Qumran and those funding the dig demands a reply. When I first read his 'mountain out of a molehill' remark, praising Shanks and Simcha Jacobovici I had to read it twice to see if this really was what he had penned or if I had accidentally stumbled upon something off Craigslist. Unfortunately, when I read on, it was as I had feared.

In a sense Aren's article clearly articulates what is wrong with biblical archaeology today as well as showing how out of touch many colleagues are with today's world of archaeology. I found it somewhat amusing that at his dig they are engaged in 'cutting edge' archaeology, as if the world of archaeology revolves around Tell es Safi. It doesn't. In a way this typifies the attitude of many today and in the past as if to say, 'I'm doing it according to the book, therefore what others do or say is of no concern to me'. This is what occurs when one places one's career or site before the profession and by doing so leaves the door open for rampant abuse as you will see.

In 2002 I was involved briefly as an adviser for the cemetery on the Qumran dig, which was carried out by a colleague in his department, of which he was then chairman. Due to numerous problems, including the planting of evidence for the media (TV) I decided that I had seen enough. Shortly thereafter I contacted the Dean's office at Bar Ilan inquiring about their policy on academic malfeasance, and never received a reply. Therefore I set up an appointment with Aren, whom I had known for years and respected. Unfortunately this went nowhere and soon it was 'business as usual' at Qumran.

His admission that he "investigated the claims and that they were baseless", begs the question, did he really investigate the claims, or did he do nothing? My first claim demanding an investigation was that the '2,000 year old' zinc coffin buried in a tomb which had been excavated in the mid 1960's was simply modern trash. It was initially 'discovered' by H. Shanks who immediately wrote an article in BAR entitled "*Jews save the Bones of your ancestors*" !!! Having garnered publicity Shanks now steps out of the picture and the 'coffin' is again miraculously rediscovered in 2002 by a metallurgist working for a Canadian firm searching for lead deposits (sic) around the world. Whosoever planted it is unknown however as the excavation license was given to the former chairman of Aren's department; the matter should have been investigated thoroughly, which I demanded. I'm not sure that he did, but if he did, then Aren and I are reading from a different script.

Shortly after it was investigated by Aren and the allegations turned out to be 'baseless', the following two published articles penned by those involved in the original research appeared. For those of you without access to the two articles, the bottom line is this: the '2,000 year old' lead coffin miraculously turned out to be zinc and was found to be coated with Barium-titanium, a

noncorrosive coating/paint patented in the 1920's. The alchemists of antiquity would have been proud. If the folks at BAR, Aren or anyone connected to the 'zinc coffin' can show that Barium-Titanium paint may have been invented/patented by the Essenes, circa 68 AD, then I will 'drop my case'.

The two references are as follows: and note the venue where the 'coffin' paint was first announced, an international conference held at the British Museum . I might add that one of the co-directors was present at the BM conference when the paper was read announcing to all present that Barium-Titanium paint was found on the metal surface.

A. 2005 Shimron, A.E. Segal, I. and Deutsch, Y. Zinc metal from a tomb in the ancient cemetery of Khirbet Qumran on the Dead Sea: ancient craft or contemporary fraud. Proceeding of the "Conference on Metallurgy – a touchstone for cross-cultural interaction". **British Museum**, London, April 2005.

B. 2006 Annual meeting of the Israel Geological Society (2006) at Bet Shean "**Israel Geological Society, Abstracts, 2006 Bet-Shean meeting**". Again the Barium-titanium coating was noted.

What makes this all the worse it that they continued to publish the unique '2,000 year old' coffin with 20th century paint several times afterward (ignoring the paint disclosure) in prestigious journals such as Dead Sea Discoveries and the International Journal of Roman Archaeology. Had a proper investigation been conducted by Aren I'm not sure that they would have continued to publish it. So much, then, for 'baseless': but one has to give them credit for turning lead, a rather base metal, into zinc in a fortnight.

As for the human skeletal remains which I claimed had been planted for the media, the TV crew covering the excavation had complained to me that 'the excavators were not finding anything of interest', evidently having been promised by staff, some very unusual discoveries in the world of Qumran/DSS studies. Well, a day or two later, skeletal remains (basically a handful) buried ca 20 cms. below the surface, miraculously , like that 'lead coffin', appeared.

Quite by chance I had obtained a copy of the original C-14 report from the lab in Arizona, (which I had shown to Aren). Two of the three C-14 dates were from the Neolithic period and the third date was from the Roman period. As they were found co-mingled it's difficult to envision that a handful of remains separated by a couple of thousand years were found together 'in situ'. If someone can provide evidence of Neolithic burials, Essene or otherwise in the Qumran cemetery, again, I will drop my complaint. For obvious reasons, the two Neolithic dates were not published.

If Aren would wish to investigate or 'reinvestigate' the claim that someone was planting evidence, the full report can be read in Revue d Qumran (2003) "*Skeletons with Multiple Personality Disorders and other Grave Errors*". During the dig the co-directors were changing the sex and identity of the four skeletons found there on a daily basis, one day John the Baptist.

However someone evidently mentioned that the skeleton had a skull so the next day he became the 'Teacher of Righteousness'. One day male, the next day female, depending on who in the media they had spoken to. The situation that summer of 2002 can perhaps best be summed up by the BBC journalist who, looking for a story drove down to Qumran to cover the dig. He later wrote and I quote - *"these days, it is hard to distinguish the smell of sulfur from the rotten stench of claims, counterclaims and accusations emanating from the nearby site of Qumran"* (Ari Goldberg. BBC News World Edition 27 August 2002).

Aren's praise of Simcha Jacobovici, whom most of us have been boycotting for years, particularly after the James Ossuary scandal, the 'Exodus' special, and the 4 million dollar Family Tomb of Jesus documentaries to name a few, along with BAR, begs the question as why would he, of all people in a position of power and responsibility, defend such. It was only at the end of his reply praising BAR, that he admits that Shanks/BAR has (have) been financially helping fund the dig, truly a miracle in the history of BAR which for many years gave less than 1% of its gross 'non-profit' earnings to colleagues working in Biblical Archaeology. Moreover, the only time I can remember Shanks/BAR funding anything seriously was when he donated \$80,000 from a \$200,000 donation to fund the 2002 Qumran dig, where Shanks first 'discovered' the lead cum zinc coffin.

Update: The 'track record' of those mentioned above: 2002-2009

A- One of the co-directors at the 2002 dig is now an archaeological advisor for Jacobovici on the Naked Archaeologist documentaries which said advisor participates in and seems to feel bring biblical archaeology to the public at large. The fact that the co-director is not an archaeologist, though he poses as one, doesn't really matter these days, as most of those 'archaeologists' out there hustling Qumran and the DSS are not either. Two years earlier he gave the Pope a replica of a key found at Beit Saida, which they term 'The Key to the Kingdom'. Most biblical scholars will say that the site has absolutely nothing to do with the biblical Beit Saida, but in the world of funding whether or it is Beit Saida, Qumran or the City of David doesn't really matter. As Mark Twain once said, 'give me a bit of the Holy Land, and I'll make myself a millionaire'.

B- Another of the co-directors recently published a book on his experiences that 2002 season entitled The Secret Initiation of Jesus at Qumran. It hasn't been reviewed but you can buy it online.

C- One of the main directors, a highly prominent DSS scholar, has been under police investigation for 'wrongdoing' -- alleged illegal activity in the region, including purported illegal activities related to the DSS.

D- Ironically one of co-directors receiving a BAR grant had sworn publicly for years that Shanks was 'the only person in the world that he would not talk to' (rightfully so, due to Shanks abuse of John Strugnell). However once BAR donated \$80,000, they began talking immediately. He now writes for BAR.

E- As for the metallurgist (co-director- as it seems that anyone who gave a 'donation' was named a co-director) who re-re-discovered the lead, turned zinc coffin was, last time I heard, lecturing at the Univ. of Nebraska at a conference on Qumran sponsored by the Beit Saida folks.

As for miracles, like Cana where water was turned into wine, the unique coffin had in the meantime now morphed into the coffin of a 'very rich man'. The fact that no skeleton, nor coffin bottom, was found, only a folded piece of 1 mm metal, didn't seem to be much of a problem for our colleagues and other 'wanna be archaeologists', in sexing and aging the non-existent skeleton. The media was happy and BAR had now moved on, along with Simcha, to the highly lucrative, James Brother of Jesus ossuary. When I first read this the miracle at Gadera came to mind.

F- Lastly, had the 'baseless' accusations been taken into account as I had requested and a few individuals received notice that such behavior is not tolerated in the academic world of archaeology and Qumran studies in particular, one of those currently under investigation would probably have ceased such behavior.

Money does indeed talk when it comes to the DSS. Anyway Aren, much of this was 'on your watch' and it's the tip of the iceberg. In a way I can understand the silence on the part of the university as it received a nice percentage of funding from outside sources by administrating such grants. If you wish to do a serious 'cutting edge' investigation, I'm around and unfortunately there's still a lot more to investigate. Meanwhile, have a look at the latest Copper Scroll Project videos (and the blog of Robert Cargill) and see who in your department appears on screen. Look familiar? And while you are investigating you might ask those in your department who it was that was securing the excavation permits for Vendyl Jones all these years. Welcome to the BAR/BAS crowd. This is where it all leads, our silence eventually turning our profession from what was once a mountain, into a 'molehill'.

Before concluding, perhaps one last word is due here for those volunteers and serious scholars (Harry, Joel, Brian, just to name a few) who were cynically manipulated and exploited by the co-directors that summer at Qumran hunting for Scrolls. And for those of you staff members who were subjected to some indignities at the Ben Gurion airport the day that you were leaving; it was not I who called the authorities nor was it on my 'watch'.